

## On the development of benefactive *lai* in Cantonese:

### Implications for the relationship between benefactive and purposive uses of directional verbs

Oral/Poster

Directional verbs are highly versatile elements that are susceptible to grammaticalization (Svorou 1994). Of these, the directional verb 'come' is observed to have grammaticalized into markers that can develop into tense-aspect markers, as well as purposive markers, among other functions, in various languages (Heine and Kuteva 2002). In Cantonese, the lexical verb *lai* 'come' has likewise grammaticalized into a purposive marker, and it can also convey past and/or emphatic meanings when used as a sentence final particle (SFP) (Cheung 1972; Leung 2005; Yiu 2001). In this paper, we will examine the relationship between purposive and benefactive uses of *lai* in Cantonese, with implications for other Chinese dialects and other languages.

The present study explores the grammaticalization of *lai* from a diachronic point of view using Cantonese data from the 17<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century. These data are obtained from several corpora, among them the *Early Cantonese Tagged Database* and *A Linguistic Corpus of Mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century Hong Kong Cantonese Movies*. Our findings indicate that the directional verb *lai* underwent two major grammaticalization processes, one pathway yielding past and emphatic markers, and the other pathway yielding a purposive marker, with benefactive uses attested more recently in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Regarding the first pathway, our data show that postverbal uses of *lai* as a co-verb meaning 'come' came to be increasingly used in sentence final position from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. This led to its reinterpretation within the temporal domain as a perfective marker, and within the pragmatic domain as an emphatic sentence final particle. The perfective marker was then further grammaticalized to allow it to carry past-tense meanings as well.

Regarding the second pathway, our data reveal that lexical verb *lai* was already used as a purposive marker during the Ming period; it was attested in Cantonese opera lyrics from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and this purposive usage survives to present-day Cantonese. Interestingly, benefactive uses of *lai* were attested in 19<sup>th</sup> century Cantonese (e.g. Bridgman 1841), and this usage survived till the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Of theoretical interest here is the diachronic evidence which suggests that purposive and benefactive markers could emerge from directional verbs independently of each other.

In this paper, we will also compare the usage of *lai* in Cantonese with cognates in other Chinese varieties, including Mandarin, Jin, Hakka and other Cantonese varieties. While the aspectual and purposive functions of *lai* are also popular in other Chinese dialects, the benefactive use of *lai* was attested only in early modern Cantonese. We posit that structural variations (e.g. a strong tendency in Mandarin to prepose modifying elements to preverbal position, whereas Cantonese has a higher tolerance for postverbal elements) help explain this typological asymmetry.

#### References:

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